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# Security Experts Differ on Effect Of CIA's Mining

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Former national security affairs adviser Brent Scowcroft said yesterday that the CIA's mining of harbors in Nicaragua "is hurting the CIA," harming Reagan administration efforts to deal with the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua and reducing the ability of the United States to use covert action as a policy tool.

In addition, Adm. Bobby R. Inman, former deputy director of the CIA and director of the National Security Agency, said that, with few exceptions, such covert operations are a bad idea because they seldom are supported by the American public.

Another senior intelligence community figure, former CIA director William E. Colby, said the degree of agency involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan waters was no different from its participation in other covert paramilitary operations worldwide.

Scowcroft, a retired general who has served over the past two years as a part-time adviser to President Reagan on arms control and strategic weapons, told reporters at a breakfast meeting that the mining controversy has "got in the way of a serious debate over Nicaragua" and that something must be done to limit the Sandinista regime's apparent desire to export revolution.

However, covert action "will be less available in the future" as a policy instrument because of the current debate, he said.

"I think the recent furor is hurting the CIA, and that's too bad," because the agency is just recovering from criticism during the late 1970s of its earlier covert operations, Scow-

croft said. He was a national security adviser to presidents Nixon and Ford.

In fact, he added, if the mining was done "as an act to convince Nicaragua" to stop exporting arms, perhaps "we should have done it overtly" in order to be more effective. Other possible open actions might include "a blockade or a quarantine," he said.

Scowcroft said covert operations should be small in order to avoid discovery. "You employ covert operations to disassociate the United States from the activities," he told reporters. "When they get as massive as this seems to be, then they are more difficult" to keep secret and "tend to be counterproductive," he said.

Inman expressed similar views. "I'm not prepared to cast an absolute vote, but if you are going to decide you've got to do something beyond diplomacy and trade," he said, "do it overtly. Do it large. Do it fast. And get out fast. Don't get involved in one that's going to have a long-term commitment. If it does, that's not going to be sustainable."

Inman, interviewed at the computer research consortium he heads in Austin, said most covert operations start because of frustration with diplomacy and overt action, or for domestic political reasons, not because covert action is the best way to deal with an international problem.

But public consensus that the action is appropriate is essential to its success, Inman said. "If you cannot build a consensus that holds, the policy is in trouble," he said.

Colby, in an appearance taped for broadcast today on Cable News Network's "Newsmaker Saturday," said

that, in actions during the 1960s in Laos and Cuba's Bay of Pigs, agents "were providing logistics, communications, air transport, training, things of that nature, and liaison, coordination, but not going out to the patrols and in the fights."

In Nicaragua, "it was consistent with what I said: CIA officers were more than 12 miles offshore in the boats, providing support for the actual operation going in as distinct from the CIA officer being on the boat going in to lay the mines," Colby said.

Colby, who was CIA director from 1973 to 1976, said members of the intelligence committees in Congress understand the degree of CIA participation in covert actions and that he would have briefed them on the mining "the way I understand it was done on this occasion."

Some committee members, including Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), said they were not properly briefed in advance. Both houses of Congress last week approved non-binding resolutions condemning the mining.

Serious questions about White House staff coordination and review of CIA covert operations in Nicaragua also were raised yesterday by a former Nixon aide who asked not to be identified.

This former official said he believed that the "international implications" of the CIA mining operation had not been adequately reviewed "and probably fell through the cracks" in the White House staff. Internal competition and conflicts among presidential advisers and Cabinet members, this former aide said, had led to a breakdown in the review process that had worked in previous administrations.

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